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# Young Leaders of Character Program: A Model of Character Education Program for Improving Life Effectiveness Skills and Civic Responsibility of Adolescents

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**Abstract:** Studies that examine character development programs are scarce. This study examines the effect of a week-long character education program in a range of life skills and civic efficacy. Thirty adolescents participated in the training. A no-control, quasi-experimental design incorporated baseline measures and a six-month follow-up. A Life Effectiveness Questionnaire and Civic Efficacy Survey were administered and open-ended questions further explored how participants incorporated program outcomes into their daily lives. The t-test comparison of baseline and pretest measures yielded no significant differences, but t-test comparison of pre-post-test analysis elicited statistically significant positive results. Findings indicate the program can provide a model for character education that fosters adolescents' sense of agency as leaders and citizens.

### Introduction

As young people discover themselves they also discover their world. They want to make an impact on this newly discovered world, as well as on their communities and schools. They are eager to explore issues, discover new perspectives, collaborate on authentic and meaningful activities, and are willing to reflect and apply new learning to real-life situations. Character education and citizenship education share similar characteristics: active participation by students, relevance to students' lives, dialogue, an opportunity to make a difference, and a respectful community of learners (Deakin, Crick, Coates, Taylor, & Ritchie, 2004; Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007). These characteristics of quality reflect developmentally responsive practices in adolescent education.

### ***Character Development***

Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg (2000) define positive youth development in terms of five attributes (Five Cs) that adolescents need to thrive: cognitive and behavioral competence, confidence, positive social connections, character, and caring. Adolescence embodies positive attributes where students can practice and learn to be tomorrow's leaders and today's citizens (Ersing, 2009). Positive youth development encourages healthy development through "positive identity, social competence, and independence and views young people as assets rather than liabilities" (Thurber, Scanlin, Sceuler, & Henderson, 2007, p. 1).

Good character is at the core of positive youth development (Nansook, 2009) as it decreases problematic behaviors (Botvin, Baker, Dusenbury, Botvin, & Diaz, 1995) and allows healthy, positive life span development (Colby & Damon, 1992; Nansook, 2009). A growing body of research recognizes that effective character development programs "support improvements in school safety and climate, academic achievement, and caring relationships" (Sojourner, 2014, p. 72). Investigating character development in adolescence is multi-dimensional. "It is both child and parent but it is also neurons and neighborhoods, synapses and schools, proteins and peers, and genes and government" (Sameroff, 2010, p. 7).

### ***Adolescent Development***

Adolescents can process and investigate complex, real-life, ethical dilemmas through social dialogue – they are developmentally ready to explore moral issues, and want to learn how to participate in society as citizens. Adolescents have the ability to hypothesize, synthesize, and reflect to make sense of their world and their purpose within that world. As they move from Inhelder and Piaget's (1958) Concrete Operational Stage to Formal Operation Stage, young people are increasingly capable of logical, empathetic, idealistic thinking. Such developmental characteristics of adolescence are naturally suited for character education programming to support young adolescent positive development. Character education programs provide opportunities for adolescents' positive development by allowing them to discover and discuss personal and global issues, use creative and critical thinking processes, practice collaboration, and enhance initiative and self-direction (Kay, 2009).

At the onset of puberty, developmental change is intertwined. Cognitive growth is influenced by physical and emotional growth that influences self perception and beliefs. As their bodies and brains develop, adolescents are ready for "more mature and abstract ways of thinking" (National Middle School Association, 2003, p. 3). Character development and identity development occur as adolescents see themselves and their world through a new and more mature lens. They search for an identity, start to think more abstractly, consider multiple perspectives, and demonstrate a passionate interest in the world around them. "[t]he emergence of self and the formation of identity are intricately intertwined with the development of perspective taking" (Martin, Sokol, & Elfers, 2008, p. 301).

### ***Character Education Programming***

Adolescents' notion of themselves, their values and philosophies take shape through social interactions and personal experience. They "differentiate, integrate, coordinate, react, and apply an active and passive accumulation" of experiences and perspectives "to develop self-understanding and first-person experience of themselves" (Martin, Sokol, & Elfers, 2008, p. 302). Adolescents begin to discover who they are and who they want to be. The middle school years is a period that literally determines individuals' and, in a way, society's future (Lounsbury, 2009). Adolescent identity development evolves by exploring social roles and establishing

personal ethics that guide individual decisions and behaviors (Jackson, & Davis, 2000). By age 12, young people have predispositions to act morally as their cognitive ability matures (Inhelder, & Piaget, 1958).

As children transition through adolescence, they become capable and interested in participatory democracy. Character education affords middle and high school students the chance to practice life skills and democratic principles (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007). For adolescent learners, character education is intrinsically motivating and personally meaningful. These students have the capability to affect change in their communities and their world by actively engaging in social activism (Beane, 2005). Natural to this age group is the issue of justice and fairness, to be democratic and moral, and to act with good character. Since adolescents are at a point in their lives when they are developing moral attitudes, values, and beliefs (Brighton, 2007) developing programs that incorporate the essence of quality character development, model morality, and practice citizenship is important. Experience and a supportive learning environment are fundamental contributors to cognitive and moral development (Brighton, 2007).

The fundamental need for sustaining social relationships with adults and peers validates that youth development programs should focus on social relationships with parents and peers in the settings in which young people live (Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008). Successful youth development programs can not only foster good character and moral identity development, but also provide a basis for supporting positive self-esteem, developing trustworthy and close relationships, and creating a sense of belonging (Jackson, & Davis, 2000). Although literature on positive youth development has been established, interventions that contribute to positive development have just begun to emerge. Lapsley and Yeager (2012) explain, "[C]haracter education, to be effective, must be comprehensive, have multiple components, address overlapping ecological contexts, be implemented early and be sustained over time" (as cited in Lapsley, 2014, p. 20).

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a character education program aiming to enhance adolescents' positive development and active civic engagement. It is hoped the findings add to the discussion of quality character education and positive youth development programming. This study examines effectiveness of the Institute for Character Development (ICD) Young Leaders of Character (YLC) training program. The effectiveness of the program is explored through adolescents' positive psychosocial development. The inherent link among character education, positive youth development, and civic engagement is at the core of this research project.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Data were collected from the Institute for Character Development (ICD) Young Leaders of Character (YLC) summer of 2008 Training Program. Participants consisted of 30 adolescents between the ages of 13 to 16, with the mean age of 14. One participant did not take part in the pre test and one participant did not complete the post-test; therefore, these participants' data were omitted from the analysis. Of the participants, 22 were females (78%), and six were males (22%). The participants were selected to the program through an application and interview process.

## ***Training Program***

Young Leaders of Character is a week-long leadership and character training program that was centered on a youth and adult partnership structure. YLC program has the following core tenets:

- a) *commitment*; to learn about and make decisions based on character and ethical decision making,
- b) *consciousness*; to understand that universal ethical moral rules are needed and everybody is responsible for their own choices and how these choices affect others, and
- c) *competency*; to develop the ability to identify and use strategies to make ethical and moral decisions (Institute of Character Development, 2008).

Upon completion of the program, these students become leaders and advocates of character. They design various workshops and presentations using the Six Pillars of Character (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship) then present them to students, faculty, and staff, along with community-based civic and service organizations. The program provides an opportunity for civic involvement in terms of being leaders of character that increases adolescents' opportunities to engage in positive development as leaders and advocates in their communities.

### ***The Objectives of YLC Summer Training:***

*Build community feeling and group cohesion.* Participants in YLC live and train together to enhance a community feeling, to develop a sense of belonging, and to establish closeness and rapport. Multi-faceted activities build a feeling of community and trust, enabling participants to be both the model and the learner. Critical aspects of the YLC training program connect with the Six Pillars of Character and include elements of youth leadership development.

*Develop knowledge.* Six Pillars of Character, the philosophical foundation of the ICD, were taught through direct instruction and experiential learning.

*Develop leadership skills.* Participants learned presentation and public speaking skills for their leadership and facilitator roles.

*Youth and adult partnership.* A signature element of YLC training was that this program was not designed as an adult-to-youth format; rather it was a collaborative effort of both students, previous participants in the program, and adult trainers. Participants were empowered and encouraged to take active roles in the training process.

*Moral decision making.* Throughout the training, participants were involved in moral decision making through role playing and interactive activities.

## ***Measures***

***Life Effectiveness Questionnaire.*** To assess the psychological impact of the program on several dimensions, Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ-H) was used. The Life Effectiveness Questionnaire was originally developed by Neill, Marsh and Richards (1997) for measuring the effect of outdoor adventure programs. Life effectiveness could be described as the factors that help an individual to achieve his/her desires and wishes in life; these skills were considered to be learned and developed (Neill, Marsh, & Richards, 2003). The LEQ-H, a 24 item self-report

instrument, measured the effect of adventure and other experiential education intervention programs on eight factors (Neill, Marsh, & Richards, 1997).

Subscales consisted of:

- *Time Management* – measuring the extent that an individual perceived she/he might make optimum use of time;
- *Social Competence* – measuring the degree of personal confidence and self-perceived ability in social interactions;
- *Achievement Motivation* – measuring the extent to which an individual might be motivated to achieve excellence and put the required effort into action to attain it;
- *Intellectual Flexibility* – measuring the extent to which an individual perceived he/she could adapt his/her thinking and accommodate new information from changing conditions and different perspectives;
- *Task Leadership* – measuring the extent to which an individual perceived she/he could lead other people effectively when a task needs to be done and productivity was the primary requirement;
- *Emotional Control* – measuring the extent to which an individual perceived he/she could maintain emotional control when faced with potentially stressful situations;
- *Active Initiative* – measuring the extent to which the individual liked to initiate action in new situations; and
- *Self Confidence* – measuring the degree of confidence the individual had in her/his abilities and the success of their actions.

Subscale scores were calculated by adding point values of the responses for each of the subscales. The LEQ utilizes an 8-point scale from 1= 'False, not like me' to 8= 'True, like me.' Neill and Flory (2000) found the LEQ scales to have high internal consistency and moderate test-retest reliability, internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) for the subscales range from .83-.88, and test-retest correlations are .59-.81. In this current study, coefficient alpha reliabilities for the eight subscales were achieved as follows: Time Management, .68; Social Competence, .78; Achievement Motivation, .80; Intellectual Flexibility, .66; Task Leadership, .87; Emotional Control, .49; Active Initiative, .82; and Self Confidence, .66. The coefficient alpha scores indicated strong reliability for this instrument.

***Civic Responsibility Survey.*** To assess the impact of the training on participants' social development, the Civic Responsibility Survey (CRS) (Furco, Muller, & Ammon, 1998) was used. The CRS was designed to measure the impact of service learning programs on participants' civic responsibility or engagement. The survey consisted of three different subscales or clusters measuring students' attitudes and feelings on Connection to the Community, Civic Awareness, and Civic Efficacy. The CRS had been designed on three levels of language capacity. In this study, the High School (Level 3) version of the survey was administered. The CRS-Level 3 had 24 items where participants responded on a 6-point scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). The overall reliabilities and subscales of CRS-Level 3 had been reported as the following: Overall, .93; Connection to Community, .63; Civic Awareness, .88; and Civic Efficacy, .85. These scores suggest moderate to high reliabilities. In this study, the reliability scores were: Overall, .93; Connection to Community, .73; Civic Awareness, .85; and Civic Efficacy, .84, which indicates high reliability for this instrument.

**Qualitative Assessment.** During the follow up assessment, the three following open-ended questions explored the extent to which participants used the information they learned in the program:

- a) Think of a time when you were challenged to exhibit good character. What was the situation?
- b) How did you decide what to do?
- c) What specifically did you do that was good character?

Open-ended questions allowed participants to determine and describe personal incidents and provided contextual data for the program evaluation process.

### **Procedure**

Participant assent and parental consent were obtained prior to data collection. To increase the reliability of this no-control-pre-post-test, quasi-experimental design, baseline measures were obtained. Surveys were administered four times to participants. The first administration for baseline data comparisons occurred when selected participants were notified of their acceptance to the program approximately one month prior to the training. It was hoped the time between baseline and pre test administrations would demonstrate that changes were attributable to the YLC training rather than a possible artifact of the testing process or by natural development. Participants also completed the surveys as a pre test just before the training program began and as a post-test immediately following completion of the training program. Six months after completion of the program, surveys were sent to participants as a follow up measure to test the continual effect of the program.

### **Data Analysis**

To explore the effect of the training program, paired samples t-test statistical procedures were administered to compare baseline, pre test and post-test measures. In addition to the significance test, standardized mean effect sizes (ESs) (Cohen's *d*) were calculated to determine how much effect the program had on the dependent variables. Effect size can be a more descriptive measure of change (Neill & Richards, 1998) and has been described as the relative extent of differences in the dependent variable attributed to the independent variable (Cohen, 1977).

## **Results**

### **Baseline and Pre Test Comparisons**

To compare baseline, pre test and post-test scores on each subscale of LEQ-H and CRS, paired sample t-test statistical analysis was employed. The descriptive statistics and t-test results for the variables are shown in Table 1. Results showed no significant difference between the baseline and pre test scores on the LEQ-H and CRS subscales.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviation, and T-Test of Baseline and Pretest Scores for LEQ-H and CRS Subscales*

Variables LEQ-H Subscales	Measures	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-test	Sig.
Time Management	Baseline	26	17.7308	2.69158	.52786	.996	.329
	Pre test	26	17.0769	3.24867	.63712		
Social Competence	Baseline	26	19.5385	3.42030	.67078	.000	1.000
	Pre test	26	19.6667	3.46677	.67989		
Achievement Motivation	Baseline	26	22.0000	2.15407	.42245	.866	.395
	Pre test	26	21.6538	2.20803	.43303		
Intellectual Flexibility	Baseline	26	18.1538	3.92624	.77000	.316	.755
	Pre test	26	17.9231	4.04893	.79406		
Task Leadership	Baseline	26	19.3846	3.55614	.69742	-.295	.770
	Pre test	26	19.5769	3.25175	.63772		
Emotional Control	Baseline	26	18.7308	2.40928	.47250	1.008	.323
	Pre test	26	19.3462	3.12336	.61254		
Active Initiative	Baseline	26	20.8462	2.98921	.58623	.201	.842
	Pre test	26	20.7308	3.62831	.71157		
Self Confidence	Baseline	26	21.0769	2.11515	.41481	.075	.941
	Pre test	26	21.0385	2.91864	.57239		
Variables CRS Subscales							
Connection to Community	Baseline	26	19.3077	3.01688	.59166	.347	.732
	Pre test	26	19.1154	2.94383	.57733		
Civic Awareness	Baseline	26	47.9231	6.32407	1.24025	1.071	.294
	Pre test	26	46.8846	6.40204	1.25554		
Civic Efficacy	Baseline	26	43.8077	6.54840	1.28425	.080	.937
	Pre test	26	43.7308	7.29689	1.43104		

### ***Pre Test Post-Test Comparisons***

Paired sample t-test statistical method was employed between pre test and post-test scores of LEQ-H and CRS subscales. Additionally, to explore the effect of the program, standardized mean effect sizes (ESs) (Cohen's *d*) were calculated. Analysis followed the principle that an Effect Size 0 meant no change occurred, a negative sign indicated decrease, and a positive sign indicated improvement after participating in the program. Values from .01 to .2 designated small effect, .3 to .5 designated medium effect, and .6 to 1 designated large effect. Descriptive statistics and t-test results for pre test and post-test comparisons with effect sizes are shown in Table 2.



**Table 2**

Means, Standard Deviation, and T-Test for Pre test, Post- test and Follow up Scores for LEQ-H and CRS Subscales and Effect Sizes

<b>Variables LEQ Subscales</b>	Measures	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-test	Sig.	Effect Size (pre-post- test) (Cohen's d)
Time Management	Pre test	27	17.0370	3.22826	.62128	-4.837	<b>.000</b>	<b>.80</b>
	Post-Test	27	19.5185	2.96610	.57083			
	Follow up	22	21.1818	1.40192	.29889	-6.462* 3.360**	<b>.000</b> <b>.003</b>	
Social Competence	Pre test	27	19.6667	3.41940	.65806	-2.672	<b>.013</b>	<b>.36</b>
	Post-Test	27	20.8519	3.13422	.60318			
	Follow up	23	21.3913	1.61637	.33704	-.259* 1.528**	.798 .141	
Achievement Motivation	Pre test	27	21.7778	2.20721	.42478	-1.763	.090	.27
	Post-Test	27	22.2963	1.53960	.29630			
	Follow up	23	22.5217	1.64785	.34360	-1.572* -.277**	.130 .784	
Intellectual Flexibility	Pre test	27	17.9259	4.02804	.77520	-1.915	.067	.36
	Post-Test	27	19.2222	3.05505	.58794			
	Follow up	23	20.3043	2.07660	.43300	-2.492 1.757**	<b>.021</b> <b>.093</b>	
Task Leadership	Pre test	27	19.5556	3.26206	.62778	-2.226	<b>.035</b>	<b>.25</b>
	Post-Test	27	20.3704	2.83044	.54472			
	Follow up	23	21.8182	1.65145	.35209	-3.437 2.306**	<b>.002</b> <b>.031</b>	
Emotional Control	Pre test	27	19.4074	3.02883	.58290	-2.657	<b>.013</b>	<b>.62</b>
	Post-Test	27	20.9630	1.82886	.35196			
	Follow up	23	21.1739	1.65145	.35209	-1.783 .295**	.088 .770	
Active Initiative	Pre test	27	20.7037	3.71913	.71575	-1.084	.288	.20
	Post-Test	27	21.2222	3.27383	.63005			
	Follow up	23	21.8696	2.05170	.42781	-1.804 1.647**	.085 .114	
Self Confidence	Pre test	27	20.8889	3.01705	.58063	-2.187	<b>.038</b>	<b>.44</b>
	Post-Test	27	22.0370	2.12098	.40818			
	Follow up	23	22.3043	1.60779	.33525	-2.068 -.526**	<b>.051</b> <b>.604</b>	

<b>Variables CRS Subscales</b>	Measures	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-test	Sig.	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Connection to Community	Pre test	27	19.1852	2.88280	.55480	-1.547	.134	0.22
	Post-Test	27	19.8148	2.58750	.49796			
	Follow up	24	19.7500	1.53934	.31422	-0.725 -1.112**	.476 .912	
Civic Awareness	Pre test	27	47.0000	6.41513	1.23459	-3.874	<b>.001</b>	<b>0.50</b>
	Post-Test	27	50.1111	5.85947	1.12765			
	Follow up	24	48.8750	5.79589	1.18308	-2.139* 1.301**	<b>.043</b> .206	
Civic Efficacy	Pre test	27	43.8148	7.14701	1.37544	-3.297	<b>.003</b>	<b>0.48</b>
	Post-Test	26	47.0370	6.07948	1.17000			
	Follow up	24	48.0833	5.63311	1.14985	-4.392* - 1.538**	<b>.000</b> .138	

\*pre test- follow up

\*\* post-test- follow up

Results illustrated a significant difference between the pre test and post-test scores on LEQ-H subscales of Time Management ( $t=-4.7$ ,  $p=.00$ ), Social Competence ( $t=-2.6$ ,  $p=.013$ ), Task Leadership ( $t=-2.22$ ,  $p=.035$ ), Emotional Control ( $t=-2.65$ ,  $p=.013$ ), and Self-Confidence ( $t=2.18$ ,  $p=.038$ ). Results suggested participants developed significantly positive changes in Time Management, Social Competence, Task Leadership, Emotional Control and Self Confidence. Since there was no significant difference between baseline and pre test measures, the significant changes could convincingly and reliably be attributed to the youth training program.

In addition to the significance, the results also yielded positive effect sizes. Time Management (Cohen's  $d=.80$ ), and Emotional Control (Cohen's  $d=.62$ ) had a large effect size, Social Competence (Cohen's  $d=.36$ ), Intellectual Flexibility (Cohen's  $d=.36$ ) and Self Confidence (Cohen's  $d=.44$ ) had a medium effect size and Achievement Motivation (Cohen's  $d=.27$ ), Task Leadership (Cohen's  $d=.25$ ) and Active Initiative (Cohen's  $d=.20$ ) had a small effect size. Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, and Active Initiative scores did not yield significant results on a .05 significance level; however, positive effect of the program was still evidenced by positive effect size measures.

For the Civic Responsibility Survey, findings implied a significant difference between the pre test and post-test scores on Civic Awareness ( $t=-3.8$ ,  $p=.001$ ), and Civic Efficacy ( $t=-3.2$ ,  $p=.003$ ). There was no difference on Connection to Community Scores ( $t=-1.5$ ,  $p=.134$ ). Since there was no significant difference between baseline and pre test measures, the significant changes on Civic Awareness and Civic Efficacy were considered reliable. Civic Awareness (Cohen's  $d=.50$ ) and Civic Efficacy (Cohen's  $d=.48$ ) both generated positive medium effect sizes. Although not significant, Connection to Community (Cohen's  $d=.22$ ) showed a positive small effect.

### **Six Month Follow up**

Follow up data were collected six months following the completion of the training program. The same survey package along with open-ended questions was mailed to the participants. For the qualitative component, the following three questions were asked:

- a) Think of a time when you were challenged to exhibit good character. What was the situation?

- b) How did you decide what to do?
- c) What specifically did you do that was good character?

Investigators believed the open-ended responses would provide examples of experiences from an early adolescent perspective to further describe the impact of the training program. Of the 28 program participants, 24 responded to the follow up surveys. Two participants did not complete the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire; therefore, they were omitted from the comparisons. The response rate was 86%.

The means and standard deviations for follow up measures are shown in Table 2. In general, results suggested six months after the training, participants maintained and improved in the majority of the domains. The comparison of pre test and follow up measures indicated participants kept improving in Time Management ( $t=-6.46$ ,  $p=.00$ ), Task Leadership ( $t=-2.492$ ,  $p=.021$ ), Civic Awareness ( $t=-2.139$ ,  $.043$ ), and Civic Efficacy ( $t=-4.392$ ,  $.000$ ). Self-Confidence ( $t=-2.068$ ,  $p=.051$ ), approached significance. The results showed participants maintained the change in many areas except Social Competence and Emotional Control. The post-test follow up comparisons denoted that participants further improved in Time Management ( $t=-3.360$ ,  $p=.003$ ). Overall, higher mean scores of follow up measures revealed that participants maintained the changes gained in the training program.

The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed with the constant comparative method of data analysis. Three coding procedures were used: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Seong-Young, Olszewski-Kubilius, Donahue, & Weimholt, 2008). The first process, open coding, organized data according to themes, overarching concepts or categories. Axial coding was then used to determine relationships across data categories, themes, or concepts. Finally, selective coding sorted the data into representative phenomena for reporting study findings.

Several themes naturally emerged from the coding of participant responses. These themes paralleled the literature regarding adolescent development and experiences, adolescent moral development, and the Six Pillars of Character.

For question one, "*Think of a time when you were challenged to exhibit good character. What was the situation?*" participant responses fit into three typical adolescent situations: school ( $n=54$ ), peer relationships ( $n=12$ ) and going to a party ( $n=4$ ). Two responses lay outside the three main situations. Representative responses for the three major situations follow:

- "People I knew were going to a party but I knew bad things would be there so I didn't go."
- "There was a lot of drama going on in my group of friends. They were making me choose sides."
- "We were going over a test in class after the teacher graded it and I found a wrong answer she had missed."

Young adolescent developmental characteristics, interests, and needs were evident within the situations described by participants. A common adolescent social experience, the party, was a central issue for some respondents. Learning to negotiate with authority figures like teachers and coaches was also highlighted by comments such as the following: "At my high school basketball game a [referee] made an extremely bad call against me that made me foul out of the game." A third developmental issue, exemplified by the next statement, involves identity

development: "My church is apply[ing] for a new pastor. He had 3 girls that were homeschooled and very shy. I included them in games, talked to them, got to know them a little better." This participant was demonstrating a move from egocentrism to empathy (Erikson, 1968). A maturing intellect was also apparent, "I just weighed the outcomes in my head and choose the better one." "I used the 6 pillars to filter my decision through."

The responses to question two, "*How did you decide what you should do?*" paralleled the moral development and character development literature. Responses included the following:

- "I decided not to go [to the party] because it goes against my morals and my character."
- "I thought about how it [two students cheating on a test] was unfair to other students and how they were disrespecting the teacher. I thought how it would affect everyone involved."
- "I first thought, 'wow that's awesome!' then I honestly thought about YLC and what all my friends in YLC would think about me, so I got up and told him [the teacher] that I missed a day and needed to make it up."

Respondents demonstrated an inner voice of conscience as well as the ability to see beyond their own selves. They used the words "morals," "character," and "philosophy." The notion of fairness, an important value in both character development and cognitive development was described. Participants wrote how they "weighed the outcomes" and "used the pillars to filter" thinking. Several respondents wanted to be "nice" or to choose "the right thing to do."

The responses to question three, "*What specifically did you do that was good character?*" elicited direct language from the YLC Training and the Six Pillars of Character. This item solidified promising statistical findings. All of the pillars were represented in at least one response. Although the Responsibility pillar was the most commonly mentioned, many responses named two or three pillars.

- Trustworthiness: "I told the teacher I had one more wrong. She did not lower my grade and liked that I was honest." "Trustworthy – I could be trusted to do what's right."
- Respect: "Respecting my parents wishes by staying home." "I respected her even though I was upset with her." (fighting with a friend)
- Responsibility: "I was responsible and went to class." (didn't skip with a friend). "I walked away. I showed responsibility for not fighting."
- Fairness: "I chose to tell people to stop. I started saying good characteristics and different things about the person to make the others stop." "Fairness – It wouldn't be fair to other kids that were there every day."
- Caring: "I try to be caring and respectful by doing little things like holding doors open." "I used the pillar of caring to be nice to them instead of being mean and it ended up working because now they want to be friends."
- Citizenship: "I kept my head up and positively cheered my teammates to a victory." "Open the door said 'have a good day.'"

Open-ended responses demonstrated the positive long-term impact of the YLC training on participants' lives. Participants were able to identify specific instances where they used good

character, could explain their thinking process, and could name the pillar associated with the situation. Their actions and descriptions directly aligned to the goals of the YLC Training Program as well as general character education programming.

## Discussion

Baseline and pre test comparisons did not yield any significant difference; therefore, the results are more convincingly attributable to the training program. Pretest posttest comparisons show that there is a significant change in Time Management, Social Competence, Task Leadership, Emotional Control, and Self-Confidence and Civic Awareness and Civic Efficacy scores. The encouraging findings suggest after participating in the program, participants have developed better abilities to perceive and effectively use their time, feel more confident in social interactions, believe they can be leaders, and think they have better control over their emotions when they are faced with stressful situations. In addition, participants are more aware of their responsibilities as citizen-leaders to improve their communities, and they felt more efficacious to create change.

Six-month follow up measures confirm maintenance of the gains and further improvement in some domains. Although Social Competence and Emotional Control subscales follow up measures are higher than the post-test scores, t-test comparison of pre test and follow up measures did not yield a statistically significant difference. After the training, participants took on active roles in their schools and communities as leaders, advocates, and role models of good character. Results imply this type of active involvement supports maintenance of the skills from the training. Examining the longer-term effects of the program is particularly important since the significant results of the post- test could have been attributed to the ephemeral effect of the cloistered experience. It appears that a one-week program can be effective in developing necessary skills to be leaders and advocates of good character. Taken as a whole, six-month sustainability suggested that YLC training appeared to have longer lasting effects on participants. The follow up measures offer more evidence for continual personal growth, providing a cumulative and additive effect of a newly created youth development program. When adolescents apply their learning into personal contexts they take ownership of the attributes of good character and behaviors of leadership. They are able to develop positively and can constructively participate in society (Larson, 2006).

The results of this study should be interpreted with caution due to some limitations. First, self-reporting measures have been used in this research and may have caused some higher-reporting or social desirability effects. In particular, since the social desirability effect has not been controlled, it is possible participants may have been responding to surveys in a way that reflect response bias. However, there is no evidence to believe the participants of this study would exhibit more response bias than any other groups in general. Limited dependent variables have been used to test the effectiveness of the program; therefore, the variables used in this study do not provide a comprehensive explanation of positive psychosocial development of adolescents. Other variables should be taken into consideration for future research. Generalizing the findings is challenging because of the limited sample size (n=28) and the characteristics of this convenient student sample. A replication of the study is recommended in different geographical areas with diverse groups of students to assess whether these results are generalizable.

Although results show positive change, some measures did not show significant change. Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility and Active Initiative subscales of LEQ-H and

Connection to Community subscale of CRS were not significant on post-test measures. It is recommended that creation of future character development programs include adding content and additional activities to develop participants' dispositions in these psychological domains. It is possible a significant difference is not observed on the domains that require a longer period of time for development, reflecting more attitudinal change or more opportunities to practice and show these personal characteristics. In addition, the YLC training program is designed for students who already have some interest in civic involvement. In other words, the program has been implemented with select students who are already highly motivated. The effect and impact of similar programs working with at-risk or other unique adolescent groups may be another interesting facet worth investigating. YLC is a flexible program that can be implemented with various groups on multiple levels and can serve as a foundation for future research. The strengths of this program are worthy of replication and the instruments used in this study are appropriate for examining character and citizenship education leadership training programs.

This study has several implications to character education and positive youth development programming literature. Unique to many character education programs, YLC is implemented outside of the school environment where participants take that learning into the school setting. This study provides results for comparative data analysis in future character education studies.

To date, the vast majority of character education programs have focused on elementary education implementations and school-wide initiatives. Adolescence is the time when individuals explore and develop a sense of identity, are more interested in social issues and civic implications, and are capable of abstract complex thinking. Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, and Silbereisen, (2002) stipulate "[i]t is youth's task to make history in the future and society's obligation to provide youth with sufficient resources and an honest basis for hope in carrying out this task" (p. 122). Character education affords students a chance to practice life skills and democratic principles. Adolescence is an appropriate time to develop civic attitudes and social responsibility, but they need support and mentorship to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of character and social responsibility.

The encouraging findings of this study suggest adolescents can benefit from similar character development programs and even a short-term character education program can be effective. This study is an example of a unique program to train leaders of character; however, more programs and evaluation studies are needed to create a body of literature regarding character development of adolescents. Adolescents are eager to explore issues, discover new perspectives, collaborate on authentic and meaningful activities, and willing to reflect and apply new learning to real-life situations. The findings of this research project affirm both the developmental attributes of adolescence and align to best practices in character education programming.

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